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Mr Jonathan Moody
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Moody

Short inspection of Sitwell Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have guided the school well over its transition to academy status and during a period of staffing and leadership change. The school is thriving and pupils of all backgrounds and abilities make good progress because teaching is effective and you have raised expectations in pupils about learning. Good relationships abound and pupils mix exceptionally well with each other, displaying kindness, respect and a high commitment to improving their work.

You have addressed all the issues raised in the previous inspection report successfully. Together with senior leaders, you provide clear direction to staff and make frequent checks to ensure high standards of teaching. Development plans are sharply focused and you have an accurate and detailed view of where further improvement is needed. Adults value your support and there is a strong sense of teamwork. 'This school has never been better', said one. Parents have a positive view of the school and know that you will respond promptly to any concerns they have. Governors, many of whom are new to the role, are keen to play their part and have already accessed numerous training opportunities to raise their awareness and expertise. They know that if they are going to increase their impact further on the life and work of the school then establishing a clear, systematic and effective programme of actions is the next step.

The outcomes in writing for Year 6 in 2016, in contrast to those in reading and mathematics, were well below the national average. You have tackled this robustly,

by seeking out good practice in other schools, making effective use of consultancy advice and providing extensive training for staff. The introduction of new approaches to the teaching of spelling and grammar have had a rapid impact and pupils are now much more confident in these areas. Writing content across the school is much improved, although you know that there is room for further development around handwriting and the presentation of written work across a range of subjects.

In addition to seeing how you had improved writing, I was keen to make sure that disadvantaged pupils are supported well. The effective identification of weak areas of understanding and quick intervention is helping this group to make better progress than they were previously so that they are now reaching standards close to those of other pupils.

I also looked at the way reading is taught and promoted. Pupils enjoy books and are able to talk about their favourite story types and authors. Good-quality fiction is integrated into English lessons and also draws on thematic work across different subjects. Pupils in the majority of classes we visited were able to read and understand texts and instructions readily.

You have developed a curriculum that is wide and varied. Lessons cover a full range of subjects and there are real strengths in history, science and especially art. These strengths do not shine through on the school website. Indeed, in some respects, the website is poorly organised and also does not meet some of the Department for Education requirements about the publication of information. This is an area that requires further attention.

Safeguarding is effective.

Procedures and documentation are up to date and fit for purpose, with recruitment vetting particularly thorough. Your systems for recording any concerns about pupil welfare meet requirements and the effective use of an electronic system is embedded. It is clear that when any safeguarding incidents occur that relate to pupil welfare, leaders have followed procedures correctly. Induction arrangements for new staff are managed systematically through the trust and you provide frequent updates to ensure staff and governors take any new issues into account. All governors have accessed safeguarding training and a governor with expertise in health and safety has conducted a safety audit. Pupils feel safe when they are in school and say that bullying is extremely rare because all staff deal with it straight away. You provide many opportunities for pupils to consider safety issues when they are out of school.

Inspection findings

- You have a detailed and accurate view of the school. Improvement planning is focused on raising standards in literacy and mathematics so that more pupils meet and exceed the new curriculum expectations. To this end, you have sought out effective practice in other schools. You have also supported English and

mathematics leaders in extending their own expertise. Clear action plans and a cohesive programme of training have driven improvements. You have implemented a tight programme of monitoring to ensure that a consistently good quality of teaching is sustained.

- The new system for identifying misconceptions through prompt intervention work ensures that the least able pupils are supported well to keep up with their classmates. Support is also provided for the most able pupils, to enable them to successfully complete the challenging tasks they are encouraged to choose. Pupils who may not be ready for the next topic, for example in mathematics, are given advance additional tuition to prepare them. These approaches are serving all pupils well, especially the disadvantaged group and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Current assessment information indicates that in all year groups disadvantaged pupils are making progress comparable to, and in some cases better than, their peers.
- There are many opportunities to develop pupils' reading skills. Teachers choose fiction books carefully to link into topics and present pupils with high-quality fiction, as in Year 6 where pupils were discussing the book 'Goodnight Mr Tom' that links to their Second World War work. Teachers present pupils with a range of different types of texts and use questioning well to draw out pupils' understanding of unfamiliar words. Teachers seize opportunities to enrich pupils' reading experiences through poetry and plays, such as the Year 3 pupils' visit to a local theatre to engage in a Shakespeare drama workshop.
- To improve comprehension skills, the English leader has introduced a new reading programme that provides a strong structure to help pupils gain a deeper understanding of what they read. Teachers make effective use of this resource and add their own 'chilli challenges' to provide thought-provoking tasks for the most able pupils. New reading books have also been introduced to support more accurate assessment.
- Pupils who read to the inspector explained that they receive frequent help with reading at school and that they enjoy reading. One Year 5 pupil said that she was a 'real bookworm' and was hooked on one author but also enjoyed trying other books introduced through lessons. Two older pupils said they liked using the local library to borrow books. Less able younger readers said that school encourages them to read at home and their reading records confirm that they do this conscientiously.
- There has been a thorough revision of the teaching of writing. Teachers use 'cold tasks' to analyse where pupils' skills are weak and then sequence teaching carefully to build up skills. Pupils then apply their new learning to 'hot tasks'. There are plentiful opportunities for pupils to write for a variety of purposes and in different styles. Writing in books and on eye-catching displays around the school is well constructed in sentences and shows a growing competence in the use of punctuation.
- Spelling is also much improved because teachers have taken a firmer line in identifying misspellings and requiring corrections. However, there is still a little careless spelling of key words in written work across different subjects, for example in mathematics. The quality of handwriting is variable because some

pupils, often boys, find it difficult to form letters of consistent size or to join letters correctly. Some poor writing leads to confusion over use of capital letters and detracts from the otherwise good writing content. Clearer guidance and support on written presentation is needed across all subjects in this respect.

- Pupils respond promptly to adults, move smoothly from one task to another and work hard so that lesson time is used productively. Behaviour around school and in the playground is calm and orderly. Pupils are extremely friendly, caring and polite, remembering to step aside for adults and saying 'Thank you' when receiving praise. They are fiercely proud of their school and display responsible attitudes. Pupils from all backgrounds mix well. They say there is hardly any bullying. If it does occur, pupils are confident that staff are quick to take action to resolve issues. Older pupils' work as 'value leaders' promotes positive play at lunchtimes. Consequently, pupils feel happy and safe at school.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school and good use is made of first-hand experiences and visits to motivate pupils. Reading and writing skills are woven seamlessly into history and science work, as seen in the work about Cresswell Crag in Year 3 and the frozen waste study in Year 4. Pupils are also able to complete homework projects that reflect a range of topics covered. The work in Spanish is at an emergent level but there is some expertise within school on which to capitalise.
- High-quality art is effectively displayed across the school, drawing on a variety of media, such as pastel, ink, clay and fabric. A variety of media for portrait work was used to illustrate the Year 5 Tudor work on Anne Boleyn. This rich variety of work across the curriculum is not fully celebrated through the school website, which also lacks detail about the content of the curriculum.
- Attendance rates are above national levels and pupils clearly enjoy their time at school. They speak enthusiastically about the extra-curricular opportunities and the many interesting events that enhance their learning. They feel safe at school and remember the online safety messages they receive through lessons, assemblies and the special Google visitor assembly. They proudly explain the Sitwell 7 Values that help them to focus on getting on with others and working hard.
- There is a good spread of relevant skills across the governing body and the trust provides strong support and overview. Governors are enthusiastic and proactive in providing support and increasing levels of challenge to school leaders. Nevertheless, their work would benefit from a more cohesive development plan to coordinate actions, training and visits to school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- Ensure that the quality of pupils' written presentation improves, by:
 - implementing a cohesive and rigorous approach to the teaching of handwriting

- providing clearer guidance to pupils about how to set out their work
 - insisting that key subject-specific words are correctly spelled, for example in mathematics
 - having consistently high expectations of the quality of written work across a broad range of subjects.
- Ensure that the governing body further strengthens its impact, by:
- drawing up an effective governor development plan that sets out a clear programme of action, training and review of its effectiveness
 - introducing more formalised systems to shape and record individual governor visits to school.
- Ensure that the school website provides fuller information about the life and work of the school by checking that the school meets all the requirements about what information it must publish in a form that is readily accessible.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Rotherham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Reid
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and subject leaders. You and I jointly observed teaching and learning in five classes. I also viewed the school's latest assessment records. You and I scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects and you joined me in viewing displays of work around the school. I examined documentation including the school improvement plan, the school's own self-assessment record, information published on the school's website and safeguarding records. I met with governors and spoke to a representative of the local authority. I considered the views of parents, staff and pupils by talking to them informally, by meeting a group of pupils and from online responses to surveys, including Parent View.